

Presence

Acts 5:1-11

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Sermon Introduction

A. Absent (vs. 1-2):

1. Sold – Ananias and Sapphira dispose of their property, like everyone was doing in the church who had property, in exchange for the price it was worth.

a) In fact, they are another exemplary illustration of the wealthier members of the community contributing to the well-being of the whole. Luke uses a relatively uncommon word for “kept back” (*nosphizō*), highlighting a similarity between this episode and the sin of Achan in Joshua 7. Joshua gave the people of Israel firm instructions not to take as personal plunder any of the articles of the city of Jericho that had been dedicated to the Lord (Josh. 6:18–19). Achan sinned by taking some of the devoted materials and hid them in his tent. He lied and deceived the community, suffering his death as a consequence. Similarly, Ananias keeps back what he presents to the apostles as devoted to the Lord and lies to the leaders of the community. [\[1\]](#)

2. Kept back – Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, without the influence from anyone from the on-set, secretly conspired to deceive the members of the church when they knew the people (4:32-36) were freely sharing all that they had. They wanted everyone to think they were doing the same thing when they were not, hypocrisy.

a) After it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? (5:4). This statement makes it clear that Ananias is under no obligation to give all or part of the money to the apostles. The practice of selling property to meet the needs of the community is strictly a Spirit-led voluntary expression of love for one another. It is not an experiment in communism or socialism. Neither is it an attempt to model the Christian community after the pattern of the Dead Sea community of Essenes as represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls.^[2]

3. Full knowledge – Ananias and Sapphira were fully conscious and in full knowledge of their decision. They purposely, with complete knowledge, conceived to deceive Peter and the congregation.

4. Bringing a portion – The decisive and persistent nature of their deception led them to act out, according to their own will, what they had purposed in their hearts to do.

a) The sin of Ananias does not have to do with what percentage of the sale price of his property he gives to the apostles. His transgression is in lying to Peter and the apostles by misrepresenting the gift as the entire sale price. His lie is interpreted as a lie to the Holy Spirit because of the Spirit's dynamic presence in the body of believers and its leaders.^[3]

b) Lev. 6:2-7 -- *"The Lord said to Moses: If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do....."*

5. The apostles' feet – Apostles, ambassadors of Christ, and eyewitnesses of Christ (2 Corinthians 15:6-9; Acts 9; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; 1 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 1:20-26), operating with all authority provided to them by Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) cause them to have leadership in the matter of taking care of those, in the congregation, who had need.

a) The earliest church in Jerusalem gets off to a grand and exciting start. Incredible opposition comes from outside the church, but God works miracles, the proclamation of the gospel prevails, and the church continues to grow. Now,

there is a sudden change. There is a significant disruption from within when two members of the community sin and face sudden and direct divine retribution. But the opposition is not strictly from within. Satan is back on the scene, attempting to derail

B. Respected (vs. 3-6):

1. Said – Peter stopped Ananias and Sapphira in their tracks and spoke to exactly what they were purposefully seeking to accomplish.

a) The apostle's complaint was not that they lacked honesty (bringing only a part of the sale price) but that they lacked integrity (bringing only a part while pretending to bring the whole). They were not so much misers as thieves and above all -liars. They wanted the credit and the prestige for sacrificial generosity without the inconvenience. So, in order to gain a reputation to which they had no right, they told a brazen lie. Their motive in giving was not to relieve people experiencing poverty but to fatten their ego.

2. Has Satan filled - Based on James 1:13-15 once Ananias and Sapphira determinatively deceived the Apostles and the members of the church, Satan took complete and total control of their actions and led them to move forward in the manner that they did.

a) Although Ananias devises the plan and suffers the consequence of acting it out, Satan also plays a role in this drama. This is his first recorded appearance after the death and resurrection of Christ when he suffered a massive defeat. He is portrayed here as actively opposed to God by attempting to destroy the well-being of this new community. He does so by his classic activity of enticing an individual to sin and defy God. He tried to derail Jesus at the outset of His ministry by tempting Him in the desert (Luke 4:1–13), by influencing Judas to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3), and by enticing Peter to deny Jesus (Luke 22:31–32). He will continue his efforts unabated against the church and its mission. For Luke, the contrast here is in being filled with the Holy Spirit (see 4:31 as well as 2:4; 4:8; 13:52).^[4]

3. Your heart – For this passage to say ‘fill their hearts’ is to assert that satan had completely influenced them mentally and emotionally so that the Lord no longer guided their moral compass. Their entire desire was to do what they had made up their minds to do. This lie is now what they passionately are going to do. There is no stopping them.

4. Lie to the Holy Spirit – It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18), and satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), so this is why Peter said, “satan filled your heart,” to speak falsehood against the Holy Spirit who lives in their lives. He is the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17). Because He is the Spirit of truth, he would have convicted them when they chose to lie. Despite the conviction of the Holy Spirit, they persisted, causing satan to influence their hearts. This process causes them to become passionate about seeking to deceive Peter and the church.

a) Their testing of the Spirit (5:9) became another of the first-time lessons provided by God in Scripture (see the Fall, Gen. 3; the Flood, Gen. 6–8; and the sin of Achan, Josh. 7). In 1 Corinthians 10:9 Paul also spoke of Israel testing the Lord. The essence of testing God was to push God to prove His presence, either to judge or to bless (cf. Matt. 4:7; see also Deut. 6:16; Exod. 17:7). Ananias and Sapphira “test the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 5:9) by presuming His unwillingness to judge sin. In this case, God indeed was with the Christian community both to bless and to judge. [\[5\]](#)

5. You have conceived - Peter said that what allowed satan to influence Ananias is the fact that he constituted in his heart, once and for all, that this is what he is going to do. Nothing could have changed his mind; he was that purposeful about what he planned to do. Cain did the same thing in Genesis 4:6-7. God could not make (because of His provision of free will) Cain change his mind.

a) If the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira had not been publicly exposed and punished, the Christian ideal of an open fellowship would not have been preserved, and the modern cry ‘there are so many hypocrites in the church’ would have been heard from the beginning

6. Your heart – Again, to say ‘in his your heart’ is to assert that satan did not make him tell this lie. Ananias totally, both mentally and emotionally, set his entire desire to keep money from God in an effort to deceive the church. This lie became what he passionately wanted to do. There is no stopping them.

7. You did not lie to men but to God – Peter was told by Christ that it is God who exposed to him that Jesus is the Christ and that it is based on God providing this revelation that the church will be built (Mathew 16:13-20). In Revelation, the seven Spirits (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) moved among the churches. The presence of the Holy Spirit is what crystalizes the church being the church. So when Ananias came to Peter, who received this revelation, he brought a lie before the Spirit, who is the truth, so it was easy to expose the lie.

8. Heard; fell down – As soon as Ananias developed a clear understanding of what Peter was continuously saying to him (what Peter said to Ananias was constantly repeated), because he had no plans to change his mind, he died. To fall means that God’s judgment was executed. It also means that he has been punished.

a) As Peter wrote later, judgment begins “with the family of God” (1 Peter 4:17). This is a case of “sin that leads to death” (1 John 5:16). This discipline was severe because it was an example, as Achan was an example to Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6).^[6]

b) The same unique verb used here for dying is also used to refer to the death of Herod Agrippa I (in 12:23) when the Lord strikes him down through an infestation of worms.^[7]

9. Great fear – phobias – When the congregation came to a full understanding of what took place, they were continuously tormented with fear and wanted to flee from God’s presence continuously. .

10. Young men got up:

a) These young men (*neōteroi*) do not hold any kind of special office. They are merely young believers who are willing to help serve the church in any way they can. It is customary for the deceased to be buried on the same day as the day of death. It is unusual for Ananias’ wife to know nothing of it. This can be explained, in part, by the supposition that Ananias is given a rapid and

unceremonious burial without the traditional mourning as a result of the community's recognition that he has been struck down by the hand of God (see Lev. 10:1–5), as happened also in Israel's history with Achan (Josh. 7:25).^[8]

C. Come Correctly (vs. 7-11):

1. Now there elapsed; done – The time arrived that God put in place for Sapphira to come before Peter.

2. His wife came in; entered – Because his wife's spirit was the same as her husband's, the end result of her entrance was predicted. This word is a reference to come into an experience, event, or Satan's entrance into a person. Her heart was just as stubborn as her husband's to the influence of God, represented by Peter.

a) They had not yet returned. The dead were buried without the walls of cities, and the space of three hours, it seems, had elapsed before they returned from the burial.

3. Not knowing; see – Sapphira was completely unaware of what had taken place with her husband. Even though the congregation was in total fear, no one had said a word to her.

4. Peter responded to her; answered – Peter spoke to Sapphira in reference to what they had conspired to do. Peter wasted no time getting right to the issue at hand.

5. Tell me – Peter could not assume she would do what her husband did, so Peter commanded her to publicly declare what she had decided to do concerning the property she and her husband sold.

a) It is clear in other instances that the apostles had the power to punish sinners and that sudden and fearful judgments were a violation of the commands of Christ. (1 Cor. 11:30; Acts 13:8-11).

6. Agreement - Because she said yes, Peter asked why she would go along with her husband and be in full agreement with him. In other words, Peter believes that this was a joint decision. She wanted to do what her husband did. Ananias did not need to convince her in this matter; she wanted to do this.

7. Why do you put the Spirit of the Lord to the test — What Peter is implicitly saying is that it makes no sense to try to make the Holy Spirit break down under evil and act in a manner that God disapproves. The Spirit of God would never engage in any form of evil or do anything contrary to the will of God. They were wasting time trying.

8. Why do you put the Spirit of the Lord to the test — What Peter is also saying is that they came to the church doing evil, believing the Spirit of God would let them get away with it. They demonstrated no reverence for the holy nature of God.

9. And a great fear – When the congregation became fully aware that Sapphira had died in the same manner as her husband, they were tormented with fear and wanted to flee from God's presence.

10. Church – The entire congregation assembled in Jerusalem was engulfed in an overwhelming sense of fear because of God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira.

a) The purpose of this account in the narrative is manifold: (1) It revealed God's displeasure with sin, particularly dishonesty, in His body, the church. (2) It marked the church off as distinct from Israel, for such discipline was not seen in Israel. The word church (used here for the first time in Acts) refers to the universal church here and in 9:31 and 20:28 and to local congregations in 11:26 and 13:1. (3) It indicated God was at work in this new group.^[9]

b) The first use of the term in Acts. It can denote either the local congregation (8:1;11:22; 13:1) or the universal church (20:28). The Greek word for "church" (ekklesia) was already being used for political and other assemblies (19:32,40) and, in the Septuagint for Israel when gathered in a religious assembly.

11. Heard – Everyone paid attention to all that had transpired and was willing to learn and perform in a manner that was pleasing to the Lord.

[1] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, p. 252). Zondervan.

[2] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, p. 252). Zondervan.

[3] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, p. 252). Zondervan.

[4] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, p. 252). Zondervan.

[5] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 501). Tyndale House Publishers.

[6] Toussaint, S. D. (1985). [Acts](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 365). Victor Books.

[7] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, p. 252). Zondervan.

[8] Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: John, Acts*. (Vol. 2, pp. 252–253). Zondervan.

[9] Toussaint, S. D. (1985). [Acts](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 365). Victor Books.